

LIVING LARGE DURING THE JAZZ AGE: "Big Chief" Russell Moore, Pima Memories, and the Changing Roles of American Indians in the Twentieth Century

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LIVING LARGE DURING
THE JAZZ AGE
“Big Chief” Russell Moore,
Pima Memories, and the Changing
Roles of American Indians in the
Twentieth Century

by
David Martínez

“Look I am just an Indian off the reservation and I got to play with
the great Louis Armstrong”

—“Big Chief” Russell Moore

WHEN RUSSELL MOORE (born August 13, 1912) died on December 15, 1983, from diabetes in Nyack, New York, the *New York Times* remembered him as both a “jazz trombonist” and as “a member of the Pima tribe.” Survived “by his wife, Ida, and his children, Randy and Amy,” Moore had enjoyed a long musical career that included playing alongside many of the greats of twentieth-century jazz, including Louis Armstrong, Lester Lanin, Lionel Hampton, Papa Celestin, Noble Sissle, Sidney Bechet, and Mezz Mezzrow, at gigs in this country and across western Europe. One of the most extraordinary lives in modern Pima history, he is the only tribal member whose death warranted a full obituary in the *New York Times*. At the time of his passing, many Pimas knew him from the black-and-white portrait of “Big Chief” Moore, playing his iconic trombone, that hung in the museum adjacent to the Gila

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[127]

River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community Arts and Crafts Center in Casa Blanca.¹

Long before the Gila River Indian Community became part of the new gaming economy—which enabled the construction of the tribal governance center in Sacaton and the Huhugam Heritage Center in Chandler—travelers took Exit 175 off the I-10 freeway to fill up with gas at the Shell station and purchase drinks and snacks at the popular convenience store next door. Just as often, people visited the museum, with an RV park on one side and a replica Pima village on the other. Mostly, though, Indian and non-Indian visitors alike went to the Arts and Crafts Center for the food, especially the fry bread with beef red chili, which was sold in the coffee shop restaurant. In many ways, Russell Moore embodied the same cross-cultural appeal that made the Arts and Crafts Center so popular.²

Viewed from a wider perspective, Moore's life and his accomplishments as a musician symbolize the epic struggle that all American Indians were making during the twentieth century. In Arizona and elsewhere, tribal members negotiated their newly acquired identity as U.S. citizens in light of the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, and worked to recover their sovereignty accorded by the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act. Moore, of course, was neither an activist nor an elder, neither a community leader nor a tribal politician. He was a musician, whose sense of self as a Pima, or Akimel O'odham, grew as his experiences as a musician took him to places opened to him by virtue of his talent. Ultimately, Moore stands as an example of the changing roles that many American Indians were assuming in an era in which they were no longer defined by the 1887 General Allotment Act, with its emphasis on boarding-school-style assimilation. In its place, Indigenous people were asserting a growing sense of self-affirmation and more often taking the initiative in defining for themselves the place of American Indians in American society.

With this in mind, I should note that Moore's status in the Pima community, like that of WWII hero Ira Hayes, has been in persistent flux, vacillating from known to unknown and back again. During my childhood, Moore's name was known but not celebrated, meaning that if Gila River ever organized an event like the 2007 Russell Moore Music Fest held at Rawhide Pavilion—which did not even exist when I was a child—my family and I were unaware of it. Instead,



A photograph of Russell "Big Chief" Moore hung in the Gila River Indian Community Arts and Crafts Center museum when I was a child. Author's Collection.

upon finishing our lunch at Arts and Crafts, my family and I typically went into the museum, which had a small gift shop that sold both O'odham and non-O'odham items, and looked at the modest exhibits of Pima culture and history. On display, along with images of Antonio Azul (an important late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Pima leader) and Ira Hayes (well known for participating in the flag-raising on Iwo Jima), was the framed image of "Big Chief" Russell Moore.

Since I did not know jazz music very well, I was unfamiliar with the prominent names mentioned in the short biography that accompanied Moore's photograph—excepting Louis Armstrong, of course. What I do recollect clearly from my numerous visits is my mother telling me that "Big Chief" was from Gila Crossing, which is in District 6 of the reservation. "D6" is also where my grandparents had their home, behind the Gila Crossing Presbyterian Church in which my grandfather, the Reverend Simon Lewis, preached for nearly four decades.

Gila Crossing was also the ancestral home of George Webb, author of the 1959 book *A Pima Remembers*, which is essential reading for anyone interested in the *O'odham himdag*, which is what we call "our way of doing things." Webb, who was born in 1893, recounts how life changed, gradually but substantially, as Christianity gained a foothold on the reservation, virtually supplanting more indigenous culture and tradition—a phenomenon that was centered in D6 and occurred during Moore's childhood, prior to his removal to his uncle's home in Illinois during the 1920s. "A church was built at Gila Crossing," Webb writes, "about forty five miles west of Sacaton down the river. My folks were some of the many Pimas who went to this new church. It was there that they received their baptism and were given English names." Hence, surnames like Webb, Lewis, and Moore began appearing on the reservation at the turn of the twentieth century. Russell's parents were J Newton and Elizabeth Moore.³

Complementing this transition to Christianity was instruction in English and in American history and politics that supposedly prepared individual Pimas to pursue work in the larger economy, typically as low-wage laborers. At the same time, Pimas were struggling to maintain their community on the reservation, where they worked diligently to recover their water rights that had been severely impinged upon by the up-river growth of non-Indian communities in the Salt River Valley.

Although Moore was in his forties and at the peak of his musical career when Webb published his book, there is no mention of the respected jazz musician in its pages. *A Pima Remembers*, of course, is largely a recounting of traditional Pima stories; nonetheless, these narratives include anecdotes from the modern era, which Webb and Moore experienced firsthand. With regard to the

cultural changes wrought on the Gila River reservation during the American period that began during the late 1850s, Webb writes: "For many years the old Pima way of life went on the same. The people put on clothes and hats, built adobe houses, learned English, and bought groceries in a grocery store." All of this in addition to becoming Christians and adopting the tools and utensils of modern American life.⁴

Still, in Webb's estimation, the O'odham himdag remained the underpinning value system of the Pima, so long as they continued farming like their Huhugam ancestors and respected their age-old connection with the land. As is evident in other parts of his reflections, Webb was not naïve about how difficult it had become for succeeding generations of Pimas to hold onto their traditional values. And this was apparent not only when Webb was a young man during the early 1900s, but also during my grandfather's generation, which included Moore (who was born a year after my grandfather), that extended into the 1920s and '30s.

Perhaps the changes that Webb witnessed during the latter half of his life were too dramatic for him to comprehend. After all, this new world was being created by much younger men and women, whose perspective on life and society was altered by the changing political climate in Indian country during the 1930s and '40s. Russell Moore's aunt, Anna Moore Shaw, a Salt River Pima who was born on the Gila River reservation in 1898, articulated this emerging point of view. Although Shaw was only five years younger than Webb, her career as a community organizer, which continued into the 1960s, enabled her to better comprehend the meaningful changes her community was undergoing as Pimas participated in WWII and the world that emerged in its aftermath.

For many American Indians, the post-WWII years brought renewed respect for tradition and for their ancestors who survived the difficult transition into the twentieth century. Shaw expressed this sensibility when she named "Big Chief" Russell Moore to her "Indian Hall of Fame," the epilogue to *A Pima Past*, a 1974 book in which she chronicled her family's and her tribe's struggle to adjust to being engulfed by mainstream American society. Ironically, at a time when many non-Indians were predicting the imminent "vanishing" of the American Indian, tribes were not only enduring, but celebrating the accomplishments of individuals who had succeeded

in a variety of modern endeavors, be it sports, education, politics, or the arts. As Shaw recounts, Moore was anxious at an early age to play a unique role in this pan-tribal phenomenon. "By 1935," Shaw writes, "when Russell graduated from the Sherman Institute in Riverside, California, he was determined to make a career as a jazz trombonist."⁵

At a time bracketed by the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act and the outbreak of WWII, Indians across the United States were entering modern life in ways that they could not have imagined a mere generation earlier. But even as Carlos Montezuma was calling for the immediate abolition of the "Indian Bureau," the liberation of Indians from an oppressive reservation system, and the integration of individual tribal members into mainstream American life, Indians across the country were organizing and asserting themselves in ways that would make persons like Russell Moore a possibility. Although the Progressive Era, from the 1880s through 1920s, is rightly portrayed as the lowest point for tribal sovereignty, symbolized by boarding schools and the Supreme Court's *Lone Wolf v Hitchcock* decision, it was also the period in which the Society of American Indians was a formidable presence, Jim Thorpe played football, and Maria Tall Chief danced as a prima ballerina. It was a time when many tribal members felt compelled to show "what an Indian can do!"

To this end, Montezuma had advocated not only dismantling the reservation system, but erasing the reservation mentality that had been conditioned into Indian minds since the Indian Bureau was established in 1849. Insofar as the word "Indian"—particularly its definition as being a "ward of the government"—is a byproduct of the colonization of Indian nations, Montezuma argued, then perhaps it is high time to dispense with the term, and cease handicapping everything Indigenous people do with it. "There is a wrong feeling, a wrong thought, and a wrong judgment that we must fight," Montezuma proclaimed before a 1915 gathering of the Society of American Indians. "It is an individual battle! It is called 'prejudice'." Decades before there were American Indian Studies programs, the Institute of American Indian Art, or the American Indian Movement, Montezuma urged his audiences to "Keep in mind that Indian Bureau, Indian Reservations, Indian Schools, Indian College, Indian Art, Indian Novels, Indian Music,



*Anna Moore Shaw. #36134, Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona.
Helga Teiwes, photographer.*

Indian Shows, Indian Movies, and Indian Everything create prejudice and do not help our race. To tackle prejudice it is better to do it face to face in the busy world. To play the same card as the other fellow we must know him." Used in this way, the term "Indian" segregated Indigenous people into a world apart, where they were belittled by mainstream Anglo-American society. Particularly during Montezuma's era, when racial segregation was the norm, such self-labeling only worsened their marginalization.⁶

Consciously or not, Russell Moore epitomized this philosophy when he stepped onto the stage. Rather than limiting himself to "Indian music," or "Indian jazz," he simply played jazz. And yet, at the same time, he held fast to his identity as a Pima. Residents of the Gila River Indian Community still remember his trips back home. My mother often mentioned Moore's visits to Gila Crossing, where he gathered with her uncles, who teased him about his television appearances with Louis Armstrong's band. Making light of Moore's performance with African-American musicians, they joked that they "couldn't tell which one was you." It was clear to everyone who knew him that Moore had become an active part of "the busy world" that bustled around the edges of every reservation across the country.

Just as Montezuma wound up in Chicago by way of New York after his legendary abduction by a Pima raiding party that then "sold" him to itinerant photographer Carlo Gentile, who took his "adopted son" back East, dramatic circumstances had relocated young Moore to the Windy City. After regaling readers with a charming story about ten-year-old Russell's attempt to cut his grandfather's hair, Anna Moore Shaw explains that: "Soon after this event Russ' father passed away, and he and his little brother Everett were sent to live with their Uncle Bill [and his wife, Marie] in Blue Island, a suburb of Chicago. Bill [a music teacher] saw to it that Russ learned to play the piano as well as several brass instruments."⁷

The connection between Russell Moore and Carlos Montezuma was more than metaphorical or coincidental. According to Moore's close family friend Susan K. Power, a Dakota elder and one of the founders of the American Indian Center in Chicago, after Russell returned stateside from an extended stay in Paris, "he said he wanted to marry and it would have to be an Indian gal. In NYC he met Ida [, an Oneida Indian and] a school teacher, who loved the theatre.

Soon they married and returned to Midlothian [Illinois?] where Ida's mother still lived." The couple held their wedding reception "at his aunt Marie's home in Blue Island [Illinois]. Marie, the widow of Dr Carlos Montezuma, had married Bill Moore, Russell's uncle . . . Russell and Ida adopted two Pima children Randy and Amy."⁸

For a variety of personal and cultural reasons, Pima storytelling (similar to other Indigenous traditions) tends to be short on revealing, or confessional, details. Consequently, the reader of *A Pima Past* does not learn what killed Moore's father, let alone the trauma it must have inflicted on Russell and his younger brother. Instead, Shaw emphasizes the success Moore achieved as a musician, playing with famous jazzmen, touring Europe, and even starting his own band, not to mention performing on popular American television shows during his eventful year (1964–65) as one of Louis Armstrong's All Stars.⁹

Moore's performances with Armstrong's All Stars—his biggest claim to fame—occurred at a remarkably auspicious time. A February 2, 1964, performance of "Basin Street Blues" on *The Bell Telephone Hour* (available on YouTube) took place on the same day that "Hello, Dolly" entered the Billboard charts at number 76 (it would climb steadily until it bumped the Beatles' "Can't Buy Me Love" from first place in the rankings). Both songs showcased "Big Chief" on trombone and the Pima musician benefitted greatly from the renewed stardom that the "Hello, Dolly" single and album generated for the legendary New Orleans trumpet player. As Armstrong biographer James Lincoln Collier recounts: "Neither the single nor the album lasted at the top for more than a week, but it was an apotheosis: for that brief moment Louis Armstrong, the boy from the New Orleans ghetto, was at the top of the American popular music industry. His records were played constantly on radio, his face shone from television sets regularly—he was on the 'Mike Douglas Show,' the 'Ed Sullivan Show,' the 'Bell Telephone Hour,' all the biggest shows of the time—and he would henceforward appear in an average of a movie a year."¹⁰

Moore's appearance on *The Bell Telephone Hour* was a case of serendipity, occurring at a time when, perhaps because of Armstrong's sudden increase in popularity, the All Stars experienced several personnel changes. Moore got his chance to join Armstrong when Trummy Young, who had been a mainstay, left the band. Moore's

gig as an All Star lasted for about a year before moving on to join Sidney Bechet in 1965, which itself was an instance of fortuity. As Bechtel's biographer John Chilton explains: "At the time Moore seemed an unlikely choice for the quartet, but Bechet seemed determined to use a trombonist and not a trumpeter in the front-line." Moore, himself, recalled that "[Bechet] liked my tone, that's the reason why I got in with Sidney. He taught me all about traditional jazz. I said, 'I don't know that music you play.' He told me, 'That's alright Chief, just come on with me and I'll play my notes and you play your notes.' He was so talented."¹¹

Anecdotes sprinkled throughout contemporary jazz literature provide insight into how Russell's peers viewed the Pima trombonist, whose height and girth often dwarfed his fellow musicians. In his biography of Bechet, Chilton recounts how, during a trip from New York to Toronto, "Bechet, [Red] Richards, and [Arthur] Trappier went by plane, but 'Big Chief' Russell Moore refused to fly and had to make the long journey by train." Unfortunately, we don't know why Moore was reluctant to board an airplane: Was it fear of flying? Or was it because of his size? Even in the days before airline deregulation and tight seating, Moore would have been in an awkward, not to mention uncomfortable, situation when it was time to buckle up. David Bradbury comments on Russell's size in his 2003 book on Armstrong, in which he belittles the 1964 incarnation of the All Stars. "[Armstrong] often looked frail next to his sidemen," Bradbury writes, "particularly the enormous trombonist 'Big Chief' Russell Moore who followed [Trummy] Young into what was probably the weakest edition of the All Stars. Moore himself was an adroit technician with a tendency to raucousness."¹²

John Chilton is more enthusiastic about the All Stars'—and Big Chief's—musicianship. In his biography of Henry "Red" Allen, another talented New Orleans trumpeter, Chilton quotes Allen's description of Russell's unorthodox trombone style. "Those books, they say to play the trumpet one must place the horn right in the centre of one's mouth with so much upper lip showing here and so much bottom lip there," Allen explains. "Well that's what I've read and while I have nothing against what it says I know a trumpet player by the name of Oscar ['Papa'] Celestin and a trombone player, Russell 'Big Chief' Moore, who can only play their instruments from the side of their mouth—and they do pretty well at that!"¹³

Two items stand out as examples of the kind of recording Moore did during the latter part of his career. In 1973, he released a now hard-to-find album *Russell "Big Chief" Moore's Pow Wow Jazz Band*. Published by Jazz Art, it features fellow musicians Ed Polcer, Dick Wellstood, Gene Ramey, and Jack Williams. Then, between 1976 and 1981, Moore recorded an album with clarinetist Joe Licari and the Galvanized Jazz Band. Licari later recalled that "I first met Russell around 1970. I was playing at a local club near his house [in Nyack, New York]. He would come in to listen and eventually he sat in with us. We became good friends. . . . We worked quite a bit together after that." What is especially distinctive about this album is that Moore, in addition to playing trombone, handles all of the vocals, except on one song. Nowhere else in the jazz literature does it mention that "Big Chief" could sing!¹⁴

Of course, Moore wasn't the only jazz musician of American Indian descent. In his book, *Cats of Any Color: Jazz, Black and White*, Gene Lees lists many of the "Indians" who have pursued, with varying degrees of success, careers in jazz: Kay Starr (Choctaw/Cherokee), John Lewis (Cherokee/Comanche), Joe Williams (Seminole), Lena Horne (Blackfoot), and Joe Mondragon (Apache). Not all of them were raised in an Indigenous community or even identified with a tribe. Lees singles out "Big Chief Russell Moore [who] was pure-blooded Pima, born on a reservation." Unsurprisingly, Moore was one of the few notable jazz musicians whose primary (in fact, only,) identity was based on his Indigenous upbringing and heritage.¹⁵

Anna Moore Shaw highlighted her nephew's intimate ties to his family and tribe on the Gila River reservation. What made "Russ" a member of her "Indian Hall of Fame" was the sincere connection he maintained with his home community. As Shaw remembered, her worldly nephew was always nostalgic for the reservation, his childhood there, and the many things from home that were unavailable to him while he was living faraway or on tour. In 1962, Russell hosted his aunt on a week-long visit to New York, showing her the sights that included the Statue of Liberty, Anna reciprocated by cooking a meal of traditional Pima foods she had brought with her. "He insisted in this . . .," she wrote. "After years of eating the white man's fare, the old tastes reminded him of his first home. Over and over he told me that he had never realized how much he

missed the traditional delicacies, especially our little brown tepary beans, a native of the southwestern desert.”¹⁶

As a well-traveled and respected jazz musician, Russell Moore was leading the kind of modernized life that countless other American Indians were pursuing at the time. Moore, of course, was exceptional in this regard. After all, not many Pimas became professional musicians, well-known outside their home community, let alone played with legends like Louis Armstrong and Lionel Hampton. Most Pimas, like Shaw’s husband, were wage-laborers in towns and cities near the Gila River. Nyack, New York, where Moore lived, across the Hudson River from White Plains, was a completely alien world to the Pima experience. And yet, while there were surely some in the Pima community who envied Moore, none of this resentment appears anywhere in Shaw’s reminiscence. On the contrary, she calls attention to her nephew’s humor and his generosity of spirit. “Throughout his career Russell remembered his [Pima] Indian heritage,” she wrote. “Every few years he would return to the reservation to play jazz for his people, eat the old Indian foods, and learn more of the traditional Pima chants, which he put on phonograph records. We always looked forward to hearing his wonderful music and laughing at his lively sense of humor.”¹⁷

One special trip back to Arizona occurred during the annual meeting of the National Congress of American Indians, held in downtown Phoenix on December 7–11, 1959. The *Arizona Republic* listed Moore’s scheduled performances, including one at the Phoenix Indian School. In an accompanying biography the newspaper informed its readers that: “When he was 11 an uncle in Blue Island, Ill., taught him to play trumpet, piano, drums, soursaphone, and French horn. He first played the trombone while attending Tucson High School. From then on he concentrated on that instrument.” A photograph of Moore and his wife, Ida, accompanied the article. The caption noted that the couple “are usually the first individual Indian members to pay their individual dues to NCAI each year.”¹⁸

Moore maintained a similar attachment to friends and family in Chicago. Susan Power recalled recently that: “Russell never failed to visit when in Chicago, to play Jazz Unlimited, Limelight and other famous jazz joints. When he was with Louis Armstrong[’s]

band, Louie [*sic*] didn't usually [share] the spotlight with another male singer, but with Russell, he did. 'Take it Big Chief' he'd say and Russell would do 'Jada'." Power, like Shaw, also visited Moore and his family back East: "Such wonderful memories being with them at jazz festivals in NY and CT and visits to Harlem, where he was always invited to sit in. I stayed with them in Greenwich Village, Haverstraw and later Nyack NY, where he died. In their Greenwich [home] I'd go to sleep listening to Sidney Bechet." Power was particularly impressed by the effort Moore made to stay in touch with her family: "He liked to call when the spirit moved him and he sure liked to tease."

True to much of Indian humor, Moore's teasing was done with the aim of making everyone laugh. As Shaw recounts, "He had us all in stitches when he spoke at our first national Indian trade fair in 1967. The funny memories he conjured up were common to us all—going barefoot on the hot desert sand, his first shoes at Phoenix Indian School, his squabbles with the school disciplinarian, getting up at 5 a.m. to milk the cows." Power remembers that Moore especially enjoyed teasing his wife, "who[m] he called 'Ida Pie' about when he decided to marry [her]." According to Power, Moore had dated "a Sioux friend" before meeting his wife-to-be. Moore cleverly explained his decision to marry Ida in this way: "And, you know it Ida, the first one who got my attention was a Sioux, but I knew better, you see those Sioux women scare me. They keep their horses ready for battle at all times, don't you Susan?"¹⁹

This close, friendly relationship motivated Ida to stay in touch with Power as her aging husband slowly succumbed to diabetes. Sadly, she shared a copy of a May 27, 1983, letter she sent to James M. Dawson, an administrator at Nyack Hospital, complaining that she "found the care both delayed and inadequate." Russell had been taken to the Emergency Room after suffering a fall down the stairs of his home, during which he complained of losing the feeling in his arms and legs. Upon being discharged—which, as it turned out, was done prematurely—Ida and daughter Amy struggled futilely to get Russell into a wheelchair. After asking for help, a "nurse came with a stool and she stood behind the stretcher [which carried Moore] to hold it steady while my daughter and I struggled to get him into a wheelchair. She [the nurse] told my husband, 'You really should lose some weight!' Of course he should.

But this statement was made to a seventy (70) year old man whose tribe of Indians has been written up in a medical journal as the most obese tribe with the highest incidence of diabetes in the United States. But how could she have known this before making her tactless remark?" Moore was eventually admitted to Good Samaritan Hospital, where Ida felt the care he was receiving was much better.

On July 24, Ida shared the details of her husband's substantial healthcare needs. Although he returned home on June 13, Russell "demanded round the clock care." It was particularly hard on Ida who broke her leg during this time, apparently falling down the same stairs as had her husband. Because of Russell's weakened condition and the immense stress that it put on Ida and Amy, on July 8 Moore had been admitted "to Summit Park Hospital, Pomona Health Complex, Pomona, NY." For the time being, Ida's limited mobility prevented her from visiting her husband. Friends, however, stopped by to see him and assured Ida that he was being well cared for. Eventually, Ida was able to visit Russell and see for herself the facilities and the quality of care he was receiving. "It is a beautiful cheery place, with caring staff," she wrote Susan. "They even bring up a stereo and play Louis Armstrong and Russell's own records for him." She continued with personal and family news, including the whereabouts of son Randy. After expressing modest but sincere hope for her family's future, Ida closed with: "Hope you and [your daughter Susan] and everyone in Chicago is doing fine. Love, Ida."²⁰

When Russell passed away on December 15, he was honored in a way befitting a jazz legend. Years later, an article in the Historical Society of the Nyacks newsletter described how, "[a]t his funeral in December of 1983, at the Presbyterian Church (now Nyack Center) on Broadway, the many jazz musicians in attendance formed a New Orleans processional around the casket and played *When the Saints Go Marchin' In* on the way to Oak Hill Cemetery." Then, on the one-year anniversary of Moore's death, "a moving New Orleans style memorial included heart-rending live music from the many professional musicians that Russell played with over the decades. Russell's nephew, Josiah Moore[,] attended the memorial service and spread a jar of Gila River earth over Russell's grave so that 'Big Chief' Russell Moore could have with him a small piece of the community that he called home." In the end, Shaw probably said

it best when she wrote that “Russ’ own highly successful career can certainly serve as inspiration for musically inclined young Indians. And on a broader level, his ability to transcend racial barriers can instill courage in all our people. Russell has numbered among his closest friends people of all races and has functioned as an equal among world-famous personalities. He has proved that the Indian is not inferior, but a person of talent, dignity, and stature. We are all grateful to have such an outstanding example to follow.”²¹

Because “Big Chief” was both talented and closely connected to his tribe, he remains a deeply honored member of the Gila River Indian Community, where friends and family remember him fondly. In 2007, the community commemorated his achievements as a musician and a Pima at the “Russell Moore Music Fest.” The event reminded Jean Nahomni Mani, one of the coordinators, of national honors Moore had received during his lifetime. In an article in the *Gila River Indian News*, she noted that “Russell was asked to perform at the Kennedy Center for the Arts in New York City. In March of 1982, he was honored on ‘First Americans in the Arts’ which was broadcast on national television. Russell walked out to middle stage, looked around, then yelled, ‘Hey Sammy, bring me a chair!’ Sammy Davis [Jr.] walked onto stage with a chair and said ‘I almost said “yes massah”.’ He gave the chair to Russell, then said, ‘I’ve been working with this guy a long time.’ Russell then played a solo of his own song ‘Wounded Knee Chant’ and received the only standing ovation of the evening, which included President [Ronald] Reagan.”²²

The 2007 music festival was generally regarded as a great success. Attendance was large and participants were many. Nearly a quarter century after his death, “Big Chief” had become much more than just a small black-and-white portrait in the “arts and crafts” museum. As I am writing this, many visitors are visiting the Huhugam Heritage Center to see a recently installed exhibit entitled “Russell Moore: ‘Blowing down barriers one note at a time,’” which a flyer posted on the Gila River Indian Community’s Facebook timeline describes as: “A new exhibit honoring Akimel O’odham jazz musician Russell Moore. The exhibit will feature his trombone and music.” The exhibit opened on September 19, 2013, and included a lecture by J Andrew Darling entitled “Pima Jazz—The Life and Musical Legacy of Russell ‘Big Chief’ Moore”

Russell Moore
MUSIC FEST 2007

- EVENTS ARE FREE -
Saturday, November 17, 2007
12 noon to 6 pm

Rawhide Pavilion (by the Wild Horse Pass Casino) off of I-10 East Exit 162

Chaka & Friends Gila River Indian Community Country/Rock/Variety	Cisco Tohono O'odham Nation Chicken Scratch	Tony Duncan Apache/Hidatsa-Mandan "Estun-bah" Native Flute Music	Tracy Lee Nelson La Jolla Nation Native Jazz and Blues
Outlit Performing Youth GRIC Community Youth DJ, Hip-hop Poetry, Graphic Art	MC: Theresa Choyguha Entertainer from Tohono O'odham Nation	Old Time Fiddlers Gila River Indian Community Elders	
Robert Jackson Gila River Indian Community Jazz/Blues/Contemporary Musician	Genesis Program Puppet Show Gila River Indian Community	Frank Poocha Gila River Indian Community Contemporary/Blues Musician	
Akimel O'odham Dancers Gila River Indian Community Traditional Performance	PeePosh Bird Dancers Gila River Indian Community Traditional performance		

Gila River Artist Market
Artist Market starts at 10 am

Great gift ideas for everyone! Native & contemporary art, jewelry, beadwork, traditional shell & painted gourds, pottery and much more! The Artist Market is part of the Russell Moore Music Fest.

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Poster advertising the 2007 Russell Moore Music Fest. Author's Collection.

that featured “unpublished images, videos, and sound clips of this important O’odham jazz musician and activist for Native Americans in popular arts.”²³

Whether or not Moore’s life story and musical accomplishments inspire any young people—Pima youth, in particular—to become jazz musicians or aficionados remains to be seen. What his story demonstrates, regardless, is that for many American Indians earning distinction is accomplished in reaction to the demands of life in contemporary American society, be it struggling against those demands or succeeding on their terms. Just as Ira Hayes attained recognition as a “hero” by fighting in a foreign war on behalf of the United States, so too did Moore achieve fame by traveling far from home at the behest of non-Pimas who appreciated his abilities. Figures like Hayes and Moore have become a prominent part of contemporary Indigenous life. They are compelling Indigenous communities, including Gila River, to reexamine themselves in light of their accomplishments, in particular those distinctions earned beyond reservation boundaries, which defied the lowered expectations that many still too often have for American Indians in the modern world.

NOTES

1. Although one might expect that Ira H. Hayes would have received a prominent obituary, given his fame after the flag-raising at Iwo Jima, there was hardly any mention of his passing, only a brief notice dated February 2, 1955, when he was interred at Arlington National Cemetery.
2. According to John R. O’Brien, “The Gila River Arts and Crafts Center was opened in March, 1971. It [was] the first of several developments planned for the area by the Casa Blanca-Sacaton interchange on Interstate 10.” For more, see *A Photographic Essay of Pima-Maricopa Indians*, compiled by Robert L. Nuss, assisted by E. D. Brown and Ruth Gardner (Tucson: Bureau of Educational Research and Service, College of Education, University of Arizona, 1971), vol. 1, part C, n.p.
3. George Webb, *A Pima Remembers* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1959), p. 84.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
5. Anna Moore Shaw, *A Pima Past* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1978), p. 257.
6. Carlos Montezuma, “Let My People Go!” *The American Indian Intellectual Tradition: An Anthology of Writings from 1772 to 1972*, edited by David Martínez (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 207.
7. Shaw, *A Pima Past*, p. 256.
8. Susan K. Power to David Martínez, February 26, 2010, author’s files.
9. Shaw, *A Pima Past*, p. 257.

THE JOURNAL OF ARIZONA HISTORY

10. John Lincoln Collier, *Louis Armstrong, An American Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 322.
11. John Chilton, *Sidney Bechet: The Wizard of Jazz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), p. 214.
12. David Bradbury, *Armstrong* (London: Haus Publishing, 2003), p. 129.
13. John Chilton, *Ride Red Ride: The Life of Henry "Red" Allen* (London: Continuum, 1999), p. 31.
14. Joe Licari statement in the 2007 *Russell Moore Fest Program*. Fortunately, although the original LP is hard to find, Licari currently sells the compact disc on his website, which displays a description that states: "During the 1970s Moore was a frequent guest of the Galvanized Jazz Band in Connecticut, often driving from his home in Nyack, NY with clarinetist Joe Licari." <http://www.joelicari.com/bigchief.html> (accessed June 12, 2011). For Moore's additional credits, see AllMusic at <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/big-chief-russell-moore-p107146/credits>.
15. Gene Lees, *Cats of Any Color: Jazz, Black and White* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001), p. 39.
16. Shaw, *A Pima Past*, p.197.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
18. "Russell Moore, Pima Indian Jazz Trombonist, Plays At Riverside," *Arizona Republic* (Phoenix), December 9, 1959.
19. Shaw, *A Pima Past*, p. 258; Power to Martínez, March 12, 2010.
20. Susan K. Power's daughter, also named Susan, is the author of *The Grass Dancer* (New York: Berkley Books, 1997), and *Roofwalker* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2004).
21. *Newsletter, Historical Society of the Nyacks*, vol. 4 (June 2006); Jacob Moore and Ida Moore, "Message From The Family of Russell Moore: Tribute to 'Big Chief' Russell Moore," *Russell Moore Music Fest Program*, November 17, 2007, p. 2; Webb, *A Pima Remembers*, 258–59.
22. Jean Nahomni Mani, "Remembering Russell 'Big Chief' Moore," on the *Gila River Indian News* website: <http://www.gilariver.org/index.php/news-cols4-colw1240-colw2240-colw3240-colw4240-gila-river-indian-news/130-august-2010-grin/1305-remembering-russell-big-chief-moore> (accessed June 13, 2011). The Rawhide facility where the fest was held, adjacent to the Wild Horse Pass Casino, still has the event listed online: <http://www.rawhide.com/im/im10/> (accessed on September 25, 2013).
23. See the Gila River Indian Community Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/gilariver> (accessed on September 25, 2013).